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Defending Our Nation. Securing The Future.

(U//~~FOUO~~) History Today - 7 October 2008

Run Date: 10/07/2008

(U) An unusual legal decision regarding materials related to the Rosenberg case has revealed that a major figure in the case passed away last spring, and has added fuel to controversies that have been burning for over half a century.



(U) In June of this year, a federal court -- responding to a lawsuit by academic historians -- agreed to unseal portions of the grand jury testimony that led to the 1950 trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. The Rosenbergs were convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage and were executed in the electric chair in Sing Sing prison in June 1953.

(U) The federal court agreed to unseal only the testimony of those witnesses who were deceased or who had agreed to the release. Among those listed was Ruth Greenglass; it was later confirmed that she had died on April 7 at age 84.

(U) David Greenglass, Ethel Rosenberg's brother, and David's wife Ruth provided court testimony that was crucial in the case against the Rosenbergs. David himself admitted passing information about the atomic bomb to the Soviets (he had been a machinist on the WWII Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, New Mexico). Ruth testified at the trial that she saw Ethel Rosenberg typing up notes taken by Julius about the bomb project.

(U) The grand jury testimony in the case, released in early September, shows major differences between what Ruth told the grand jury and what she said in open court. Combining this with some recent statements by a surviving member of the prosecution team in the Rosenberg case, the New York Times concluded that Ruth Greenglass was coached in her testimony and lied on the stand to help convict Ethel Rosenberg.

(U) In exchange for their testimony, Ruth Greenglass was not prosecuted, and David received only a fifteen-year sentence.

(U) Through Project VENONA, the exploitation of encrypted Soviet espionage cables, the government knew that the Rosenbergs and both Greenglasses were guilty of passing secret information to Soviet contacts. However, the existence of VENONA was classified top secret and could not be made public, even in a trial.

(U) In VENONA, Ruth was known by the codename WASP. Soviet officers who dealt with her reported that she had been recommended to run a "safe house," where secret meetings could be held. She also willingly asked her husband to give the Soviets classified data about the atomic bomb, and she traveled to New Mexico to help gather it.

(U) As of this writing, David Greenglass survives her and is living under an assumed name.

(U) The Center for Cryptologic History has published an introduction to VENONA; you can [read it online](#), or [order a hardcopy version](#).

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